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Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Cooperation with other regional bodies

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I. Introduction

1. As indicated in Council resolution 1998/46, annex III, the role of the regional commissions as part of their institutional landscape of their respective regions calls for close cooperation between the regional commissions and other relevant regional bodies in their respective regions. The regional commissions have indeed intensified this cooperation during the past year, as reported below.

II. Economic Commission for Europe

2. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) is firmly committed to strengthening its cooperation with organizations active in the region so as to ensure a more efficient use of resources. Moreover, the transition process and the new phenomena challenging development in Europe, produced or exposed by crises, call for a new dimension of the cooperation between pan-European institutions. The needs of Europe could indeed be better served if guided by a common strategy emerging from the shared assessment of issues and problems, a stronger policy cohesion and concerted problem-solving activities.

3. Efforts made to strengthen cooperation between ECE and regional or subregional entities and institutions, along the lines set forth by the Commission at its fifty-second session, include intensified cooperation with the regional intergovernmental organizations identified below.

4. ECE cooperated with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in areas related to the economic dimension of security. This is illustrated by two main events in 1998, a brainstorming seminar organized by ECE on the economic dimension of the Charter on European Security (Geneva, November 1998) and substantive contributions by ECE to the sixth OSCE Economic Forum (Prague, June 1998). In addition, ECE contributed to various workshops and seminars organized by OSCE.

5. The seminar focused on (a) the conceptual framework of security and (b) the cooperation between OSCE and ECE. The seminar helped to improve understanding of the activities of the two organizations, and on substance, it emerged from the meeting that there was no comprehensive theoretical framework linking economic variables to security and therefore no way to draw definite conclusions of early warning economic indicators. The best way to assess security risks in countries affected by tensions or crisis would be multidisciplinary fact-finding missions.

6. ECE prepared a major background paper for each of the two segments of the sixth OSCE Economic Forum, on the implementation of the participating States' commitments in the OSCE economic dimension; and energy security in the ECE/OSCE region. It also provided substantive inputs to various OSCE seminars throughout the year.

7. In addition, ECE hosted the preparatory meeting to the Nantes conference on subregional cooperation processes in Europe, which is a follow-up to the Monaco conference on the same topic. The preparatory meeting agreed that the themes of the Nantes conference will be promoting the environment; energy security; social protection; and combating corruption and criminality in business.

8. In the field of economic analysis, close contacts have been maintained with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with respect to countries with economies in transition. ECE regularly participates in the meetings of the OECD Economic and Development Review Committee, and participates in the work of the OECD/World Bank Workshop on the Development of Fixed-Income Securities Markets in Transition Economies.

9. In the field of environment, the cooperation between the two organizations is quite broad. A major field of cooperation is the environmental performance review programme, in which OECD experience is applied to a number of countries in transition within the ECE framework. In the case of the Russian Federation, there is currently a joint review led by OECD. The Task Force for Central and Eastern Europe, serviced by the OECD secretariat, has the same geographical scope as that of ECE, and the two organizations are on regular contact so as to avoid duplication of efforts. In the area of human settlements, OECD work on spatial planning and urban governance is of particular interest to ECE.

10. Within the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project, the ECE Committees on Sustainable Energy and on Environmental Policy collaborated with the European Energy Charter and International Energy Agency (OECD) in the preparation of the European Energy Conservation Initiative for the Ministerial Conference on Environment for Europe held at Aarhus, Denmark, from 23 to 25 June 1998.

11. The ECE Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development has cooperated closely with the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables. The OECD Scheme adopts United Nations/ECE standards and creates explanatory brochures based on them to facilitate their application. The need to streamline work on the adoption,

dissemination and application of standards in this area is increasingly recognized, and discussions between the relevant bodies of both organizations and their respective secretariats are well advanced.

12. In the area of statistics, ECE relies heavily on data collected by OECD for its economic analysis of West European and North American countries. In return, ECE provides OECD with economic statistics for countries in transition. OECD is among the key intergovernmental organizations that actively participate in the Conference of European Statisticians, the plenary sessions of which alternate between ECE and OECD headquarters. Relationships between the two organizations are also well developed in the field of conceptual and methodological statistics, and both organize joint meetings in this area.

13. With respect to subregional organizations, ECE also cooperates with the Central European Initiative (CEI) and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). These organizations, while enjoying the political support of their member countries, lack the infrastructure and capacity to implement many of their projects, relying on, *inter alia*, ECE for technical inputs and support. A cooperation agreement between ECE and CEI was signed in May 1998, which provides a mechanism for the implementation of the CEI/ECE Cooperation Programme. Cooperation with BSEC has been particularly focused on issues related to small and medium-sized (SMEs) and energy.

III. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

14. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) cooperates closely with the various intergovernmental organizations in the Asia and Pacific region, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Pacific Forum secretariat, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Colombo Plan and the Pacific Community. Examples of such cooperation include:

15. The fourth consultative meeting of executive heads of subregional organizations, organized by ESCAP, was hosted by the SAARC secretariat at Kathmandu in October 1998. It discussed cooperation among subregional organizations in Asia and the Pacific in the areas of trade, investment and infrastructure development; the role of regional organizations and scope for cooperation in light of the recent initiatives in poverty alleviation at the regional and subregional levels; and scope for cooperation in the area of human resources development, including joint formulation of a project on human resources development for youth.

16. ESCAP explored new avenues with the South Pacific Forum secretariat for joint collaboration for the benefit of the Pacific island countries, including presentation of a paper entitled "Examples of sound practices by other countries in the areas of investment promotion and facilitation" at a meeting of heads of Pacific investment promotion agencies organized by the Forum secretariat.

17. With SAARC, ESCAP formulated two project proposals, entitled "SAARC seven sisters: district development, coordination and improved poverty project design (phase II)" and "An independent evaluation of government poverty eradication programmes of the SAARC countries" for consideration by the SAARC secretariat.

18. With the ASEAN secretariat, ESCAP organized a workshop on institutional and human capacity-building for the new entrants into ASEAN. ESCAP also participated in the meeting of the ASEAN heads of statistical offices. It has assisted the new members of ASEAN in facilitating their transition.

19. ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) have ongoing substantive cooperation in several fields, including trade, statistics, energy and environment, following a memorandum of understanding signed between the two bodies in 1993. ESCAP also collaborated with the Asian Development Bank in the implementation of a meeting of senior officials on approaches for a positive trade agenda to the year 2000 and beyond in May 1999.

20. ESCAP provided technical support to the Mekong River Commission in the fields of water and mineral resources and in space applications, and participated in their sessions and donor meetings. Similarly, the Coordinating Committee for Coastal and Offshore Geoscience Programmes in East and South-East Asia participated in ESCAP activities on urban geology, coastal zone management and offshore minerals.

21. ESCAP collaborated with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (APEC) secretariat in the implementation of a project entitled "Human resources development for the post harvest/food sector" to enhance cooperation between APEC and non-APEC countries.

22. In the social sector, ESCAP collaborates with intergovernmental regional organizations in various activities, including (a) joint development of a workshop on disability and development with AsDB and Disabled People's International; (b) provision of a resource person at

a regional workshop on the theme "Changing population age structure and implications for development: national policy development in selected least developed countries of Asia" in January 1999, organized by the Colombo Plan, Help Age International and the International Institute of Aging (INIA); (c) collaboration with the South Pacific Commission in the promotion of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including the convening of national workshops and the organization of a subregional workshop in May 1999; (d) participation at a consultative meeting with the South Pacific Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the implementation of the Convention in the Pacific, held at Nadi in 1998; (e) presentation of a paper at a regional seminar on sustainable local community development and the role of microcredit in rural development, organized by the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific in March 1999; (f) organization of a regional conference on trafficking in women in November 1998, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, the International Migration Organization, the National Commission on Women's Affairs of Thailand and the Asian Women's Fund.

IV. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

23. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) strengthened collaboration and coordination with other intergovernmental regional organizations with respect to the division of labour, joint activities and meetings, and participation in each other's activities.

24. A significant part of the collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) took place within the context of the Tripartite Committee, in which all three organizations provide technical support in the follow-up to the implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which since the Santiago Summit (April 1998) has experienced a considerable increase in the level of its activities. In addition, the last stage of the OAS/ECLAC joint programme on social policies for Latin America was executed, and collaboration in the Caribbean subregion continued with OAS in the execution of joint projects on education and small and medium enterprises. In the case of IDB, the collaboration spanned through a wide array of activities, including the second phase of the regional programme in support of the use of demographic information in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of social projects, the beginning of a project entitled "Improving the surveys on living conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean", collaboration in the study of legal aspects of the management of water resources, and the sponsorship by IDB of the Tenth Regional Seminar on Fiscal Policy, *inter alia*.

25. ECLAC also joined the Latin American Economic System and the Latin American Integration Association in organizing of the Fourth Meeting of Authorities Responsible for Trade Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the field of energy, ECLAC continued collaborating with the Latin American Energy Organization in a project on energy and sustainable development and in the organization and technical support to the Twenty-ninth Conference of Ministries of Energy.

26. At the subregional level, ECLAC continued its close collaboration with the secretariats of the Central American Integration System and the Caribbean Community.

V. Economic Commission for Africa

27. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) collaborates closely with the other two main intergovernmental regional organizations in Africa, namely the organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), as well as other subregional intergovernmental organizations in the region. Collaboration between ECA and the regional and subregional organizations reflects the recognition that collaboration among the various organizations in the region can produce results that exceed the sum total of each individual organization's contribution to the development of Africa. Collaboration between ECA and OAU proceeds on three tracks, namely, on a bilateral basis between the two organizations, focusing mainly on programme and projects implementation; within the framework of the annual meeting of OAU-United Nations agencies; and in the context of the joint secretariat of OAU-ECA and AfDB. Important examples of bilateral cooperation between ECA and OAU are in the articulation of common positions or perspectives for Africa on various issues, and in joint project execution, such as the ongoing project on the establishment of the African Economic Community (AEC), in which both organizations are involved in drafting protocols for the treaty establishing AEC and strengthening the capacity of the subregional economic communities which will serve as building blocks for AEC.

28. A joint secretariat comprising OAU, ECA and AfDB was established by a decision of the Assembly of Heads of

State and Government of OAU. The executive heads of OAU, ECA and AfDB meet periodically to review political, economic and financial trends and developments in the region with a view to defining approaches and harmonizing their work programmes in assisting countries of the region. The ninth consultative meeting of the chief executives of the three organizations was held at Ouagadougou on 5 February 1999. The annual consultative meetings offer the three organizations a platform for shared advocacy and leadership on regional issues. In their 1999 joint statement, the heads of the three organizations called on the international community to support African initiatives in conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict resolution as well as international efforts to improve eligibility criteria and relax the terms for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt initiative.

29. ECA has undertaken a number of studies in support of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African Centre (COMESA). These include, most notably, a feasibility study on the establishment of self-financing mechanisms for the regional economic communities and compensation and equalization mechanisms for furthering economic integration process. An ECA mission has also carried out a critical assessment of the secretariat structure of COMESA. At the end of the in-depth review of objectives, structure and processes, the ECA mission proposed an organizational structure for COMESA which has since been approved by the COMESA Council of Ministers.

30. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) will also benefit from ECA studies on establishment of self-financing mechanisms for regional economic communities and compensation and equalization mechanisms for furthering economic integration process. In addition, ECA has submitted a proposal for the establishment of a policy analysis and coordination unit in the SADC secretariat. This proposal was based on a strength, weakness, opportunities and threat analysis of the SADC institutional role. The proposal defined the rationale and options for the establishment of a policy analysis unit within the secretariat and its operational modalities as well as the preconditions for the successful take-off of the unit.

31. At the request of the secretariat of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ECA has undertaken a comprehensive review of the mandate, structure and functions of the secretariat. Among the notable features of ECA recommendations for restructuring the ECOWAS secretariat and the ECOWAS Fund is the reconstitution of the sectoral and fragmented units into coherent multidisciplinary team. ECA and ECOWAS are also collaborating in the implementation of a number of sectoral programmes.

32. Based on decision by the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) Conference of Heads of State and Government, ECA was requested to assist in relaunching regional integration in ECCAS, which has been dormant for most of its eight years of existence. ECA's Subregional Development Centre for Central Africa was entrusted with the task of reviewing the ECCAS Charter, the question of arrears of member States and the ECCAS debt, as well as with developing a programme for relaunching and integrating the economies of the subregion. ECA undertook extensive consultations on measures for relaunching ECCAS. As a result of this mission, a number of reports have now been prepared towards the revitalization of ECCAS, entitled "Strategic framework on regional integration and subregional cooperation"; "Rethinking development in Central Africa in the twenty-first century"; "Making regional integration the engine for sustained growth"; "Sustainable development at the national level"; and "Programme for relaunching regional integration in the Central African subregion and renewing ECCAS, 1999–2001".

33. ECA is collaborating closely with the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in many areas. For example, ECA is assisting the secretariat of AMU in reviewing the transportation systems of AMU member States, with particular focus on railway interconnections.

VI. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

34. Cooperation with Arab regional and subregional organizations continued in the course of 1998.

35. Cooperation between the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States (LAS) continued during 1998, especially in the area of follow-up to the four global conferences at the regional level. ESCWA and LAS co-sponsored four regional preparatory meetings for the Arab conference on integrated follow-up to global conferences, namely the Arab Conference on the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab region, follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, and the Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (for ~~details see E/1~~999/14/Add.2). In addition, ESCWA

cooperated with subsidiary bodies of LAS in the areas of food industries, human settlements, statistics and trade. In this regard, it cosponsored with the Arab Federation for Food Industry a regional meeting on agro-food industries (Beirut, June 1998); presented a paper on poverty, settlement and urban development to a symposium on city settlements organized by the Arab City Development Institute (Morocco, June 1998); participated in the Arab Labour Conference (Cairo, March 1998) and the twenty-third meeting of the Standing Statistical Committee of the Arab Monetary Fund (Cairo, November 1998); and presented a paper at ESCWA's seminar on trade efficiency (Beirut, November 1998).

36. ESCWA participated in the sixth Arab Energy Conference held at Damascus from 10 to 13 May 1998, which was cosponsored by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, LAS and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO).

37. ESCWA presented two papers on entrepreneurship development and training concepts and on the experience of ESCWA in promoting the role of business incubators in industrial development to the first regional meeting organized by AIDMO, in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, on the theme "The role of small and medium-scale industries in industrial development" (Cairo, February 1998).

38. The Commission participated in an Arab regional seminar on the theme "The Uruguay Round agreements on technical barriers to trade and on the application of sanitary and phytosanotary measures: implications for the business community", held at Amman from 12 to 15 July 1998. The objectives of the seminar, sponsored by AIDMO, the International Trade Centre and UNDP, was to present essential elements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements mentioned above and support Arab enterprises in the fields of quality and information related to the Uruguay Round. ESCWA also participated in the Eighth Arab Conference on Industrial Development, and presented a paper entitled "The impact of WTO on textile and garment industries". The Conference was held at Damascus from 22 to 25 June 1998.

39. An expert group meeting on the theme "Standardization in the Arab countries", organized by ESCWA in cooperation with AIDMO, was held at Amman from 2 to 5 February 1999. Further areas of collaboration between the two organizations involves the issuing by ESCWA, in cooperation with AIDMO, of a bulletin on Arab industrial statistics once every two years.

40. In accordance with the memorandum of understanding that exists between ESCWA and the Arab Planning Institute (API) and as requested by API, ESCWA conducted a training course on the theme "Start your own business" in Kuwait in February 1998. Substantive and financial backstopping of API to ESCWA's expert group meeting on the theme "Assessing economic developments during the past 25 years in the region and priorities for the next decade", scheduled to be held in May 1999, was discussed. In addition, ESCWA participated in an international conference on the theme "New economic developments and their impact on Arab economies", organized by API at Tunis in June 1998.

41. ESCWA cooperated with the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) on the implementation of regional priorities of Agenda 21 and on the outcome of the 1997 special session of the General Assembly. It participated in the tenth meeting of CAMRE (November 1998) and discussed with CAMRE ways for furthering of environmental cooperation.

42. It also participated in the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR), held at Cairo in June 1998. ESCWA's proposal to JCEDAR to carry out jointly an expert group meeting on the enforcement of environmental legislation to be held in 1999 was accepted.

43. ESCWA participated in a meeting of a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) technical committee on the establishment of an assessment mechanism of intraregional and interregional transport infrastructure in the Gulf countries, held at Riyadh from 18 to 20 October 1998. Discussions also covered the establishment of a database for the transport sector. Agreement was reached on the guidebook on the classification of transport information to be prepared by ESCWA. In addition ESCWA and GCC reviewed means and measures to connect power grids and establish a unified electricity network in GCC countries.

44. Cooperation issues in the area of transport were recently reviewed by ESCWA and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Consequently, ESCWA is preparing a project proposal to the Bank on the assessment of the international/regional transport system to enhance interregional trade flows. For its part, IDB has agreed to co-sponsor with ESCWA a WTO regional workshop on dispute settlement procedures and practices, to be held at Beirut in June 1999.

45. ESCWA co-organized and co-sponsored with a number of regional and international institutions, including GCC, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, UNDP,

the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization and others, the Fourth Gulf Water Conference launched by the Water Science and Technology Association, held from 13 to 17 February 1999 in Bahrain. The overall objectives of the Conference, at which ESCWA presented a paper, were to encourage scientific studies and research in the different fields of water resources, and create a forum for open discussions and exchange experiences among the Arab Gulf States.